



Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

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## **Michigan Department of Human Services, national foster care advocates agree on new strategy to protect vulnerable children**

Changes to 2008 settlement focuses resources to improve Michigan's child welfare system

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Michigan Department of Human Services Director Maura D. Corrigan and the national advocacy organization Children's Rights today announced changes to a 2008 federal lawsuit settlement that are designed to fix long-standing issues in the state's foster care system.

The modified agreement establishes new benchmarks for reform, strengthening support for families and children in foster care, and gives DHS greater flexibility to make reforms. DHS and Children's rights have presented the revisions to U.S. District Court Judge Nancy G. Edmunds to be entered as a Court order.

"Gov. Rick Snyder and I are moving quickly to fundamentally change the culture of DHS and ensure children committed to our care live in safe, loving and stable homes," said Corrigan, a former Michigan Supreme Court justice who has spent much of her career promoting adoption and foster care issues. "In the past six months, we have taken concrete steps to hire hundreds of caseworkers, recruit and retain high quality foster and adoptive parents, provide essential resources for children and families, and remove barriers that left too many children waiting too long for a permanent home.

"This new agreement gives DHS greater flexibility to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and direct more resources into protecting and caring for children."

DHS has been under the watch of a federal court monitor since 2008, when the state agreed to a series of sweeping reforms to settle a class-action lawsuit brought by Children's Rights on behalf of children in Michigan's child welfare system.

Among the key changes to the 2008 agreement:

- DHS will build on the new initiatives launched this year to recruit and retain high quality foster families, provide essential resources to children and families, and remove barriers to adoption.
- Caseworkers will spend less time filling out and filing reports and more time providing direct services to children and families.
- Local supervisors will have greater ability to make decisions that are in the best interest of the children and families they serve, rather than having all those decisions centered in Lansing.
- Duplication of services among DHS workers is eliminated, allowing the department to deploy more frontline caseworkers.

- DHS will have more flexibility to hire and train key staff. The former agreement required all supervisors to have a master's degree. This left DHS unable to promote some outstanding workers, regardless of their skills or accomplishments.
- DHS will not be required to conduct a redundant second study of its operations. The department spent \$4 million in 2008 on such a study, which continues to guide reforms.
- The agreement will streamline rules that have caused confusion among caseworkers and distracted them from their core job: protecting children.

There are currently an estimated 14,700 children in Michigan's foster care system.

The modified agreement also sets a new timeline for reform. This timeline recognizes the recent loss of more than 1,300 DHS workers due to a 2010 state employee retirement incentive program and the rollout of a new department-wide software system that has been fast-tracked by Corrigan.

DHS has partnered with six colleges and universities in an innovative program to ramp up hiring of top talent. More than 800 workers have been hired and trained so far this year.

The department also is working to launch a new data management system by October 2012. This system will align disjointed technology systems to better protect children and provide meaningful metrics to evaluate the department's performance.

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